

The World's Villages

South Indian Village



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General Editor

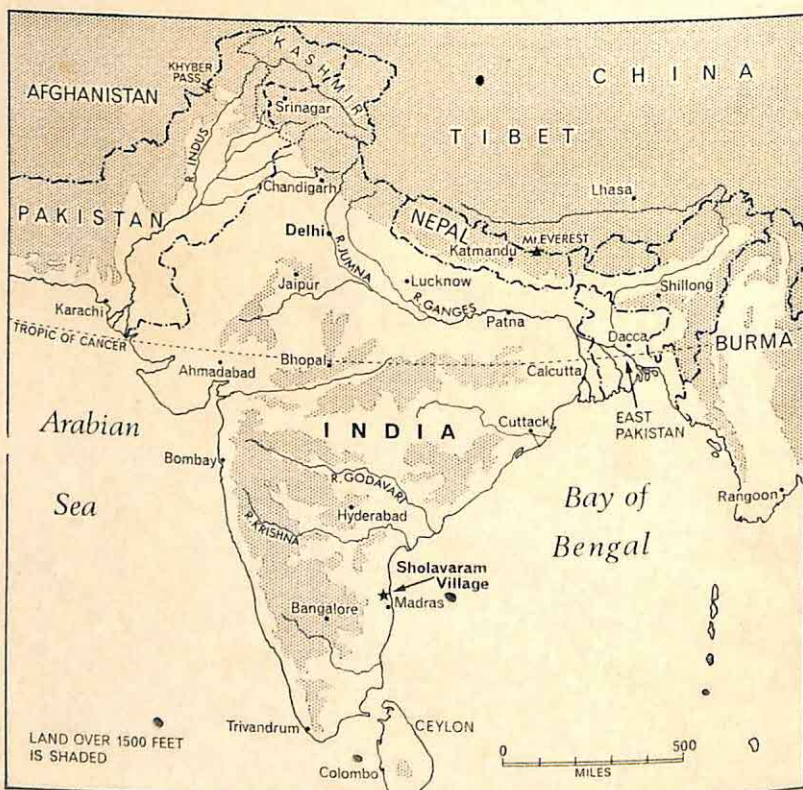
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South Indian Village

1891

by T.O.Newnham, B.A.,B.Sc.



The arrow shows the location of Sholavaram village.



PLATE 1

AT THE VILLAGE POND. Most Madras villages like Sholavaram have a pond or two where people come to wash themselves as well as their utensils, clothes and cattle. A well can be seen on the far side of the pond.

(Courtesy of P. N. Srinivasan.)

SOUTH INDIAN VILLAGE

India is building up industries at a considerable pace, but it is still a land of villages. There are about half a million altogether, with nearly 20,000 in Madras State alone. In this booklet we shall take a look at one of them.

THE WAY TO SHOLAVARAM

Sholavaram lies in the extreme north-east corner of Madras, in the District of Chingleput about 20 miles from Madras City. It





PLATE 2

Tapping the date palm.

(Courtesy of
Indian Council of
Agricultural
Research)



PLATE 3

Madras is pre-eminently the land of the Palmyra palm. (Courtesy of Indian Council of Agricultural Research)

Date 17.2.2005
Comm. No. 10989



is right by the main road which links Madras with Calcutta, a thousand miles away. Fast cars speeding along the smooth-surfaced highway are a familiar sight, yet the villagers of Sholavaram follow a pattern of life still largely unaffected by the technical advances of the twentieth century.

We reach the village by driving along this highway from the great and growing city of Madras (population 1,729,000: 1961), the capital of the State and third largest city of India. As we motor north along the coastal plain we understand why Madras has been called "The Land of the Palmyra Palm". These tall, graceful palms waving in the sea breeze make an unforgettable sight, and here and there we spot the nimble "toddy gatherers" scaling up the swaying trunks to tap the young flower stalks.*

The narrow coastal plain extends inland for about 30 miles to a background of blue-purple hills which mark the peninsular interior. All around is an expanse of padi fields, broken up here and there by groves of trees such as palms and mangoes. Each of these usually denotes the presence of a hamlet. From the air, another feature of the landscape stands out, the countless saucer-like reservoirs or "tanks", large and small, in which rain water is stored.

MADRAS AND THE MONSOONS

When asked about the climate of India, most of us immediately think of the monsoons. We have an idea of long, dry, dusty months broken by a dramatic "bursting of the monsoon" when the summer rainy season begins in June or July. In fact, however, Madras is the one part of India where this picture of the climate does not hold good. This is because the State is so completely sheltered by the high mountains to the west. It lies in a "rain-shadow" area during the months from July to September when the rest of the country is experiencing heavy rains from the south-west.

As if in compensation, however, the Madras coast, alone of all India, gets a good quota of rain from the *north-east monsoon* which around November brings moist winds which have passed over the Bay of Bengal. After these rains, there is a long dry spell from

* There is a great flow of sugary sap to the developing flowers in a number of members of the Palm family, notably the Date Palm and the Palmyra Palm. Drawers of toddy take advantage of this. The toddy may be fermented to make an alcoholic drink or evaporated to make a brown sugar (jaggery).



PLATE 4

This primitive water-lifting device, the *picotah*, is still seen everywhere across the Madras countryside. It is very similar to the *shaduf*, used in both ancient and modern Egypt. The latter is usually worked by one man, who has a rope to pull down the unweighted end of the beam, thus lowering his bucket into the water. Here, a boy raises and lowers the bucket for his father by walking the "see-saw" on either side of the vertical support. Note the long bamboo pole to help him keep his balance. Down the water channel about fifty yards (not in picture) his five-year-old sister was directing the precious flow along the rows of beans.

January to June. The Madras farmers meet this difficult climatic problem by impounding as much rain as possible in the earth tanks which are to be seen everywhere in this countryside. In such a tropical climate crops will grow all year round if only water can be provided for them. In February, at the time of our visit, modern electric pumps and ancient picotahs are working overtime.

THE CASTE SYSTEM

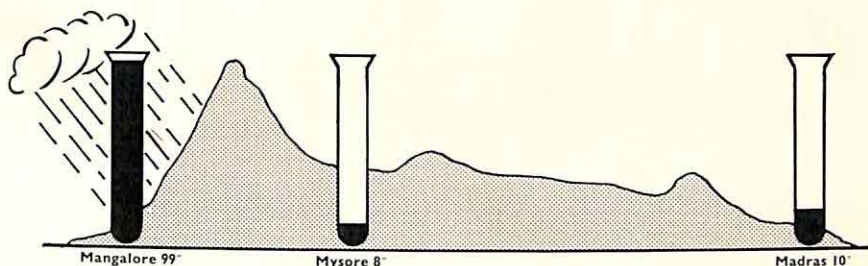
The peoples of South India are mostly descendants of the dark-skinned Dravidians. It was from a blending of their ancient beliefs and customs with those of the fairer-skinned Aryans of the north that the Hindu culture of India evolved. Immediately on arriving in Sholavaram, we come face to face with a very significant feature of Hindu life, the caste system. We find that there seems to be not just one village, but six—and that each of these constituent ham-

lets is the preserve of a particular caste-group. The idea of caste has been a feature of Hinduism for thousands of years and still flourishes strongly to-day, although the barriers between the castes are not quite as rigid as they used to be.

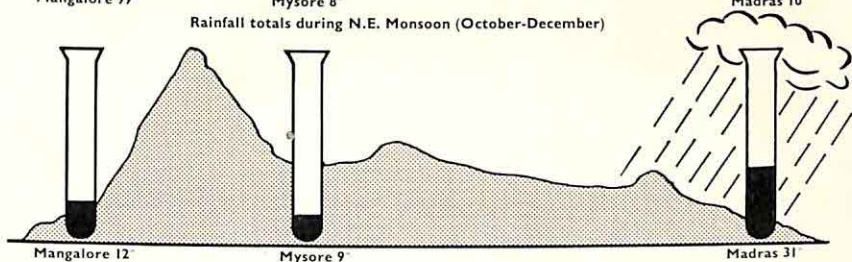
There are several thousand different castes in India. Formerly they could be divided into four major groups, the priests and

SECTIONS ACROSS THE SOUTHERN DECCAN

Rainfall totals during S.W. Monsoon (June-August)



Rainfall totals during N.E. Monsoon (October-December)

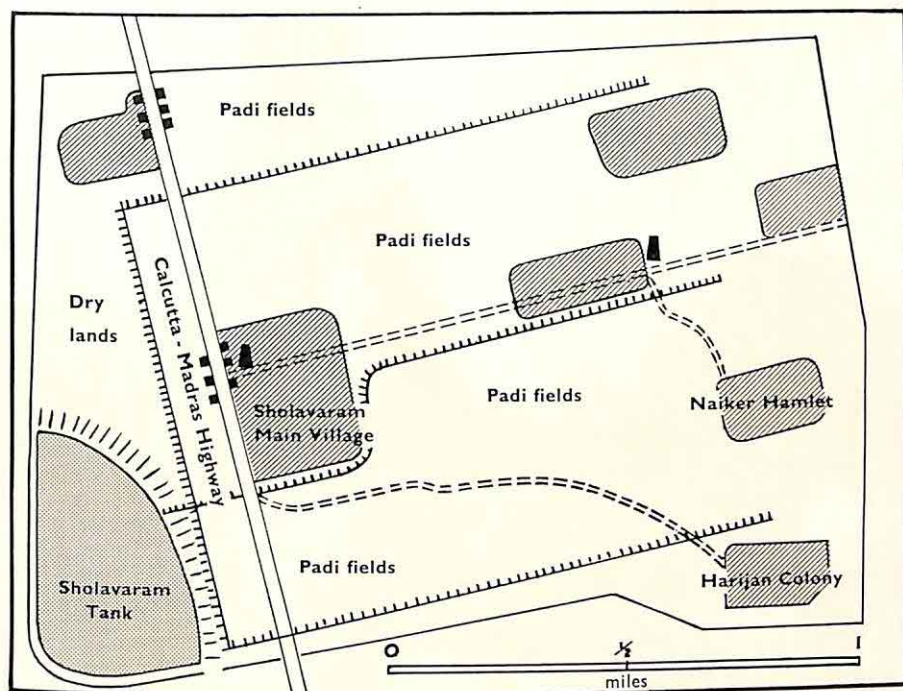


scholars, the warriors, the farmers and traders, and the labourers. To-day, the castes remain, but they are not restricted to their former occupations, and it is usual to classify them into these three groups—High, Medium and Low Hindus. Below these groups are the people without caste, the so-called “untouchables”. Members of each caste are bound to carry out carefully and thoroughly a whole range of customs and rites. These rules are held to be particularly important in all matters concerned with marriage and food, and formerly it was generally forbidden to marry or take food with members of another caste. It is still the practice to marry within the caste, but nowadays it is quite common to find people



PLATE 5

The poorest class in Sholavaram are the *Harijans*. Traditionally, they were treated as "untouchables", and although this system is gradually being broken down they still live in a separate part of the village called the *cheri*. This Harijan girl stands outside her mud-walled home. The roof is thatched with palm leaves and padi-straw on rafters of bamboo. There are no windows. In the pen in the foreground is a calf, which is the family's only possession apart from a few clothes, earthenware pots and their hut.



--- Irrigation ditches ——— Tracks ▲ Temples ■ Shops and stalls

Map of Sholavaram Village, showing dispersed hamlets where different caste-groups live.

eating with members of another caste, especially in public tea-houses.

The hardest barrier of all to break down, however, has been the stigma of untouchability. Formerly, a caste Hindu felt defiled if he approached within forty feet of an untouchable. Now the Indian Constitution protects these unfortunate people. They are known as the "Scheduled Classes" and may no longer lawfully be treated as outcasts. Nevertheless tradition dies hard in rural areas and even to-day few other villagers are willing to share water from the same well as members of the Scheduled Classes.

In Sholavaram there are two hamlets or "cheris" of Harijans who are members of a Scheduled Class. They are landless agricultural labourers, but not the only ones in the village. Members of all the other main castes except the Brahmins are to be found in this occupation.



PLATE 6

This view looks across the fields to the edge of one of the hamlets of Sholavaram and shows the home of another poor villager. The typical pyramid shape is clearly seen, with the pointed thatched roof and the eaves of palmyra palm leaves reaching right down over the low mud walls and almost touching the ground. This keeps the interior of the hut as cool as possible. In the background rises a *gopuram*, the gateway of the village temple and a typical example of South Indian architecture.

HOMES AND HAMLETS

The lands of Sholavaram total 1,475 acres, and a glance at the map on page 7 shows that the seven hamlets are scattered in all parts of the area. The principal centre of the village is that adjoining the main highway, opposite Sholavaram Tank, and here there

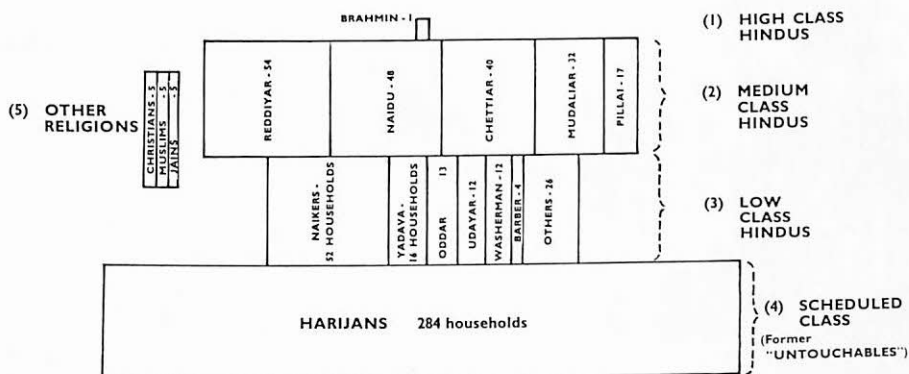


Diagram showing the number of households in each caste in Sholavaram. It should not be taken as typical of other villages—in fact there is no general pattern. Usually there would be more Brahmins than is the case here. A number of this caste have left Sholavaram and gone to live in Madras City.

are a number of shops and stalls which gain some custom from passing travellers. One of the village temples stands here; another shown on Plate 6 is in a second hamlet about a mile away to the east.

Tracks through the padi fields link up the various clusters of habitation. For the most part they are wide enough to take bullock carts, the common form of transport. Bicycles are becoming quite common in other areas but few villagers in Sholavaram can afford them.

There are 28 wells in various parts of the village lands, many of them worked by picotahs as shown in Plate 4. It is reckoned that one such well can irrigate two acres of land. But most of the irrigation water comes from Sholavaram Tank, being led out by a system of channels which enable it to supply nearly 900 acres of the village lands.



PLATE 7

The Harijans of Sholavaram are hard-working farm labourers but very few of them own any land of their own. Usually the whole community is hired by a landlord to carry out his essential farming tasks throughout the year. Here, in late February, a group of men are lifting young padi plants from a nursery bed, tying them in bundles to be carried over to their womenfolk who are transplanting them out in a nearby field. In the background is seen stubble from a rice crop which has recently been harvested, for in the warm climate of Madras it can be grown in all seasons. Usually, however, there are two main seasons, coinciding with the two monsoons.

Most of the houses are built of bamboo and mud with roofs thatched of straw and palm leaves. The Brahmin family and a few Medium Hindus in Sholavaram Main Village, however, have brick homes with tiled roofs. Most homes are simple rectangles consisting of a single room. There may be niches on each side of the doorway for burning lights for religious purposes, and the outer door post usually shows traces of vermillion and saffron placed there every Friday in honour of Lakshmi, one of the Hindu goddesses.

THE UNITY OF THE VILLAGE

Although, like most Madras villages, Sholavaram is dispersed into separate hamlets, there are certain occasions when all the villagers may come together. In the temples, which are surprisingly ornate and beautiful for such a poor village, there are regular festivals concerned with the marriages and incarnations of the gods and goddesses. At such times all the villagers may congregate at the temple and celebrate the festival together. Also in the main hamlet is an open space called the *choultry* where the villagers meet for gossip, and the *chavadi* which serves as a court for hearing all disputes about caste questions. There are also common pasture grounds, threshing floors and the village as a whole rates itself to pay the workers who maintain the Tank and its irrigation channels. These matters are the concern of the *Panchayat* or Village Council.

FARMING

Farming in South India is vastly different from anywhere in the western world to-day, although it could very well be likened to that in Europe in the Middle Ages. In spite of the efforts of the Indian Government to promote Land Reform,* the system of landlords, tenants and landless labourers remains, although the labourers are no longer serfs as they were a few years ago.

Some tenants actually work on the land they rent, but mostly they simply hire labourers to do so. More than half the rural

* Efforts have been in two main directions—the fixing of a “ceiling” on the size of farms, and minimum wages for farm labourers, about 2s. per day.



PLATE 8

After the soil is well soaked, the padi field is ploughed three or four times. The simple wooden plough does not turn the earth but simply stirs it up. Here five Harijan ploughmen drive their pairs of bullocks round and round through the mud.



PLATE 9

The ploughing team works the entire surface of the field to a soft puddle, and is followed by this pair of bullocks yoked in a similar way and drawing a *levelling-plank*. Notice the power lines and electric light at the door of the pumphouse. Under the Five Year Plans electricity is reaching more and more villages. Few in Sholavaram can afford it in their homes, but landowners with electric pumps can bring more water more quickly to their fields than those still using the picotah.

population of Madras is made up of farm labouring families. In Sholavaram they number over a thousand, mostly Harijans, and on their shoulders falls most of the day to day toil on the village lands. They are paid wages by the day, but usually can find employment only for about half the year.

Under the old system, which really amounted to serfdom, the landlord often paid no wages but supplied his workers with food. In addition he would give clothing and an extra gift of rice on certain important festivals. At the birth of a child another gift of rice would be made, usually 16 lb. for a boy and 8 lb. for a girl. The difference was because the boy would work for the landowner when he grew up whereas the girl would go away after her marriage. This old system still continues to some extent and, where it does, the landlords pay lower wages than the minimum.

THE FARMING YEAR

"The world centres around the tip of the plough." — Tamil proverb.

In the warm climate of Madras, crops will grow all year round. It is water which is the limiting factor, and so farming depends on the monsoon rains and on the amount of water that can be saved from them and made available during the rest of the year. In Sholavaram the main padi crop is grown to coincide with the North-East Monsoon when ample water is available both directly as rain and from Sholavaram Tank.

Crops and Seasons at Sholavaram Village.

In early August the nursery beds are prepared with great care. They are ploughed again and again until a fine tilth is obtained, and any manure that can be spared is applied. Then the sprouted padi seeds are sown. About five weeks later they are ready for transplanting. Next the fields themselves are flooded, and ploughed with almost the same care as was given to the nurseries. There may have been a green manure crop grown on the field previously, if so the plants are now pulled and trampled into the mud. Where possible green leaves are also obtained and spread over the fields which are kept flooded to help the leaves rot. Artificial fertilisers such as urea, phosphates and ammonium sulphate are widely used

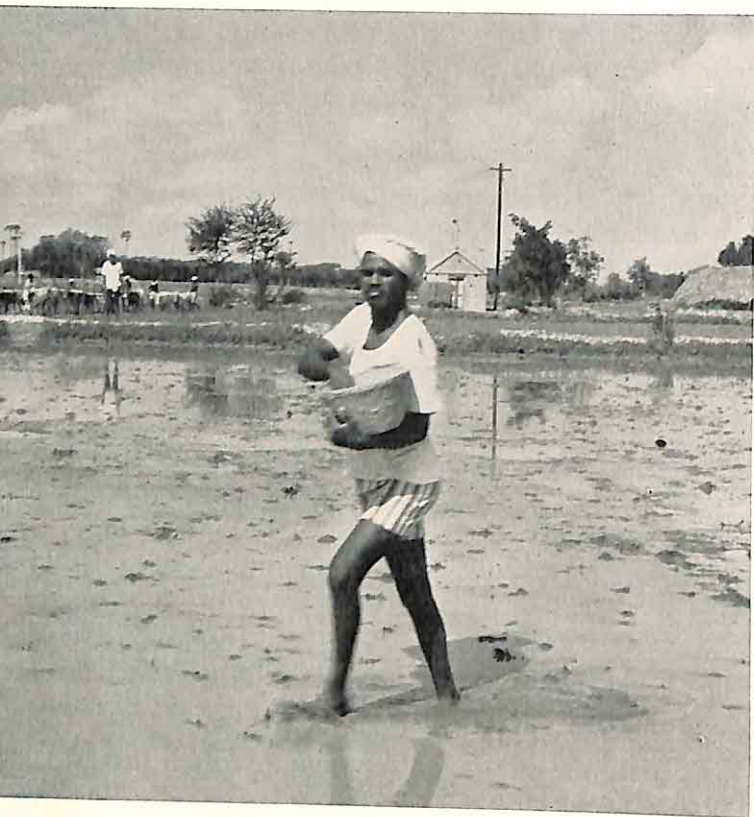


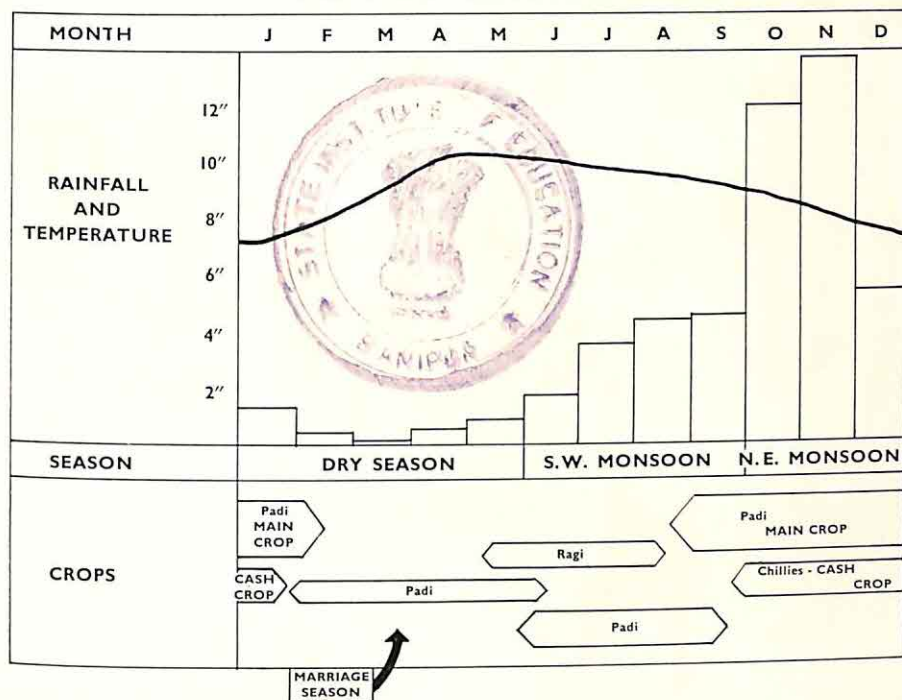
PLATE 10

In general, Indian crop yields are very low and this is largely due to lack of manure. Around Sholavaram, however, the landlords realise the value of fertilisers and spend up to £5 per acre each year on them. This is a high figure by any standards. Here a Harijan worker is broadcasting urea, a valuable nitrogenous manure. Ammonium sulphate and ground nut cake are also used extensively.

by the more prosperous landlords. They spend up to £5 per acre on them, a high figure by any standards.

Ploughing is repeated three or four times until the entire surface is stirred into a soft puddle and the field is then levelled with a levelling-board. After transplanting is completed the bunds which enclose the water in the fields are checked to repair any leakage of water through crab or rat holes. Then the water is drained out for a short time so that the seedlings will take root more quickly. When it is let in again, care is taken not to submerge the crop, and from then on the level is carefully controlled to keep pace with the growing padi. Nearly 60 inches of water is needed from planting to final irrigation, and the Sholavaram farmer expects to get about

FARMING CALENDAR



half this amount from the north-east monsoon rains falling directly on his fields and to make up the rest from the tank supply.

During the growing season the labourers will be out again in the flooded fields from time to time, weeding the crop by hand. It is then that the greater part of the village lands becomes a sea of waving green padi, although here and there are patches of dry crops such as chillies which are sold for the market.

In January the north-east monsoon is over, very little rain falls and the padi ripens quickly in the hot sun. About a week before harvest the water is drained from the fields. At reaping time the labourers cut the crop with their hand sickles and tie it into bundles. Sometimes this is done when the padi is dead ripe, so that the other operations of threshing and winnowing are carried out on the same day. Otherwise the crop is stacked and left for a while. Threshing is usually done in two stages, by beating the sheaves on the ground and then by treading them with cattle. The

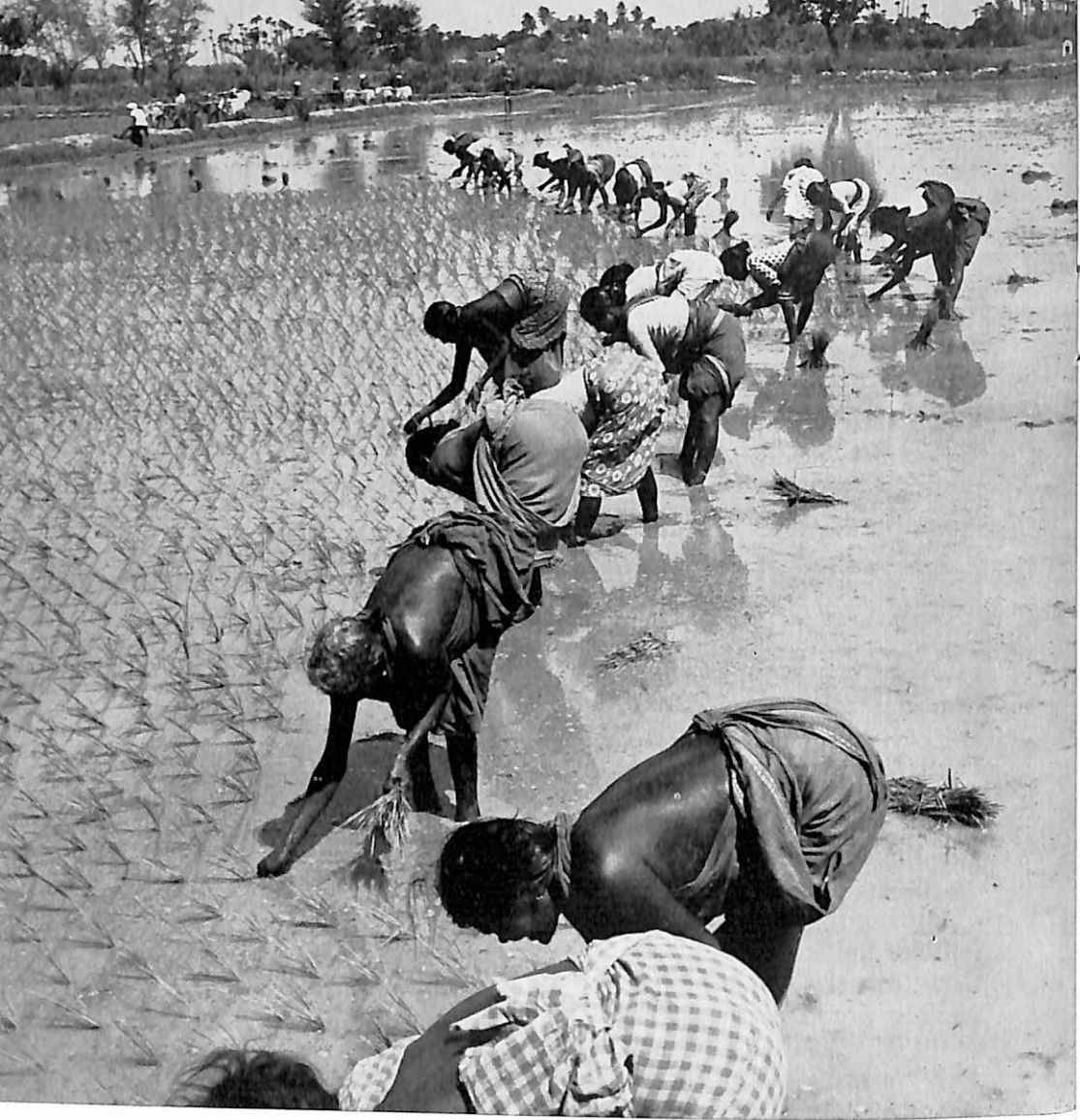


PLATE 11

As the long line of planters moves slowly across the padi field it is kept supplied with bundles of seedlings brought fresh from the nursery bed nearby. Harijan women are renowned as experts at this back-breaking work.



grain is cleaned by pouring it in the wind to separate the seeds from the chaff. Then it is usually stored in large, sun-dried, mud bins.

In February also the chillies are picked, dried and bagged. By now it is well into the dry season. For most of the villagers, when the harvest is gathered, a pause must come in the yearly round. This is the most popular time for marriages in Sholavaram.

Fortunate landowners who have wells or pumps can take a crop during the dry season, but only about a quarter of Sholavaram's lands are thus used. Such a padi crop is sown in late January and harvested in June. It is more usual for a second crop to be grown during the south-west monsoon season, from June to September. In a few cases, though, three crops a year are grown.

The Ragi Crop

For those who cannot obtain tank water from June to September, a dry crop of *ragi* is commonly sown. *Ragi* is one of the many types of millet that are so widely grown throughout India, especially where less water is available or where the soils are poorer. Sometimes it is irrigated and it will then yield nearly four times as much as the dry crop.

The harvesting of *ragi* requires much care and close attention for the individual earheads do not ripen at the same time and the harvest must extend over a number of days. The earheads are gathered as they ripen and are allowed to ferment slightly in heaps when the grains become loose in the husk and are easily trodden out by cattle.

A DAY IN FEBRUARY

A feature of South India which is surprising to people from cooler climates is that at any one time it is possible to see all manner of farm operations going on simultaneously. Most of the photographs in this booklet were taken one day in late February. Let us imagine we are looking around Sholavaram on such a day. We start from the main village on the busy highway and walk down past the great tank now barely half full. Turning off the road we take the dusty bullock track leading to one of the Harijan colonies. Around us most of the fields look dry, cracked and bare. They still carry the stubble of the main padi crop which has been



PLATE 12

It is typical of the Madras countryside that all manner of farm operations may be under way at the same time. On the same February day as the transplanting was being done, another Harijan group in the next field were engaged in threshing the previous rice crop which had been harvested a few weeks earlier. The method is simply to beat the sheaves on the ground. Later they may be trodden by cattle.



PLATE 13

Here is seen the next stage, that of cleaning the grain by winnowing. It is poured in the wind so that the chaff blows clear of the grain. Note the large number of workers engaged in threshing and winnowing, two tasks which could well be carried out by a single machine. People can be used only because of the very low wages they are paid, about £1 per month.

harvested the month before, and here and there cattle and goats are grazing, although the pasture they find is poor indeed.

Then we come upon a group of Harijan men lifting the seedlings from a flooded padi nursery, whose rich emerald green provides a striking contrast to the yellowed stubble fields around. Although it is February, it cannot be called winter as the temperature is around 80° F. and most of the men are almost naked, dressed only in a loin cloth and a loose turban to protect their heads from the blazing sun. As they lift the plants they deftly tie them in bundles for one of their number to place on a tray and carry away on his head.

We follow him a matter of a hundred yards or so and come upon further groups of Harijans, both men and women, in adjoining fields, which have been flooded. The men are ploughing. They have already finished the preparation of one of the fields in which the women are gathering ready to commence transplanting the padi.

We pause first to watch the ploughmen. There are five of them, each with a pair of bullocks yoked to the simplest of ploughs. Round and round the field they go, until the mud has been puddled almost to the smoothness of a potter's clay. The treading by men and cattle plays nearly as much part in this as the plough itself, which does not turn the earth but simply stirs it up. When they are judged to have churned the mud sufficiently, a levelling-plank is drawn over it by another bullock-team. Now the field is ready for the planters.

We turn to watch this operation which is already under way in the next flooded field. A team of twenty or so Harijan womenfolk, renowned for their skill at this work, move slowly in line across the field, planting as they go. This is one of the most important tasks of all in padi-farming and, like so many other burdensome jobs in Asia, it is usually reserved for the women. They chatter quietly to each other as they work back across the field, turning around now and then to pick up their next bundle of seedlings which have been set out behind them. It is a moving sight to watch the area of fresh young seedlings spreading out over the field and to think of what the padi crop means to countless millions of people throughout Asia.

HARVESTING

A stone's throw away, another twenty or so Harijan men and women are threshing and winnowing the main padi crop which has been reaped and stacked a few weeks earlier. We watch the women climbing up the stacks and bringing the padi sheaves to the men. The latter beat the bundles on the ground and then scoop up the fallen grain and winnow it in the wind. The straw is stacked again alongside and will later receive a second threshing, this time being trampled by cattle.

THE WEDDING

The sound of amplified music floating across the countryside calls us away from these age-old scenes. It comes from Thottakaramedu, the hamlet of the Naiker caste, which lies about half a mile to the north-east. Our friends tell us that a wedding is in progress so we make our way along the bunds and over the fields into the grove of mango trees and palmyra palms which surround the hamlet of this Low Hindu caste.

Just about the whole caste group is at the wedding—it is in fact the wedding season. Most of the country people have little to do in February except those labourers such as the Harijans employed by a landowner who can obtain water supplies in the dry season.

To-day Natarajan is to marry Sundarammal. The wedding was arranged a long time ago by their parents, but that is not the reason they do not smile. It is simply not the custom to do so on this the most serious and exciting day in their lives.

A dais of bamboos festooned with leaves and flowers has been erected in front of the bride's home, and instead of the usual musicians with pipe, drum and cymbals, recordings of the traditional songs are played over a loudspeaker system hired for the occasion. Although not invited guests, we are eagerly welcomed and asked to take a wedding photograph. The villagers crowd around as we also snap the expert dancer who has been performing for the guests. She is not dressed in the gorgeous sari gleaming with diamonds which we might see at a rich man's wedding, but she has been trained in the classical dances and every smile, movement and "mudra" (hand gesture) has a meaning, harking back to the old Hindu scriptures and religious stories.

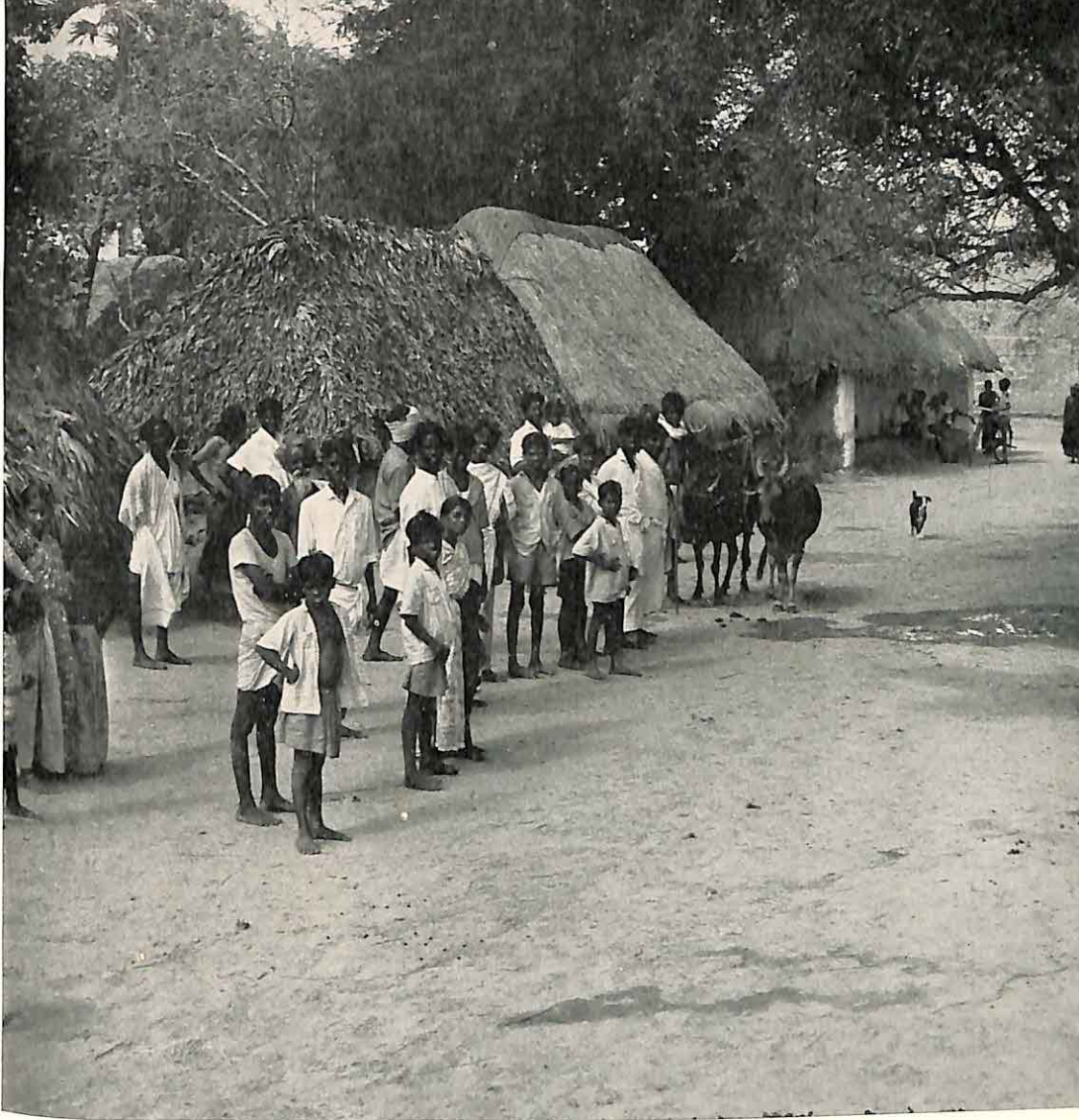


PLATE 14

This is the main street of Thottakaramedu, the hamlet of the Naiker Caste in Sholavaram. They are an advanced caste who are mainly small landowners and tenant farmers. The villagers in the picture are gathering for the main ceremonies of a wedding.

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STATISTICAL SUMMARY

Sholavaram Village: Ponneri Tehsil, Chingleput District, Madras State, India.

Location: 9 miles north of Ponneri Town on main highway Madras-Calcutta.

Population: 2,689 (1956). *Density:* 1,160/square mile.

Area of Village Lands: 1,475 acres, of which 1,130 are cultivated, mostly double-cropped.

Religion: 99 per cent. Hindu. *Languages:* Tamil and Telugu.

Usual Foods: Rice, ragi. (Poorer people have less rice and more ragi.)

Chief Crops Grown: Padi, ragi, chillies.

Average Size of Farm Holding: 2.4 acres. (There are 230 separate holdings, more than three-quarters of them are smaller than 3 acres.)

Numbers of Livestock:

Bullocks	295
Cows	276
Male Buffaloes	42
Female Buffaloes	109
Young stock	423
Poultry	526
	1,669

Housing: 81 per cent. of homes are mud and thatch; 19 per cent. of homes are brick and mortar. Three-quarters of all homes are less than 200 sq. ft. in area.

Other Buildings:

- 27 shops
- 4 temples
- 2 schools
- 1 dispensary
- 1 co-operative mill office
- 1 dye-factory
- 1 flour mill

Literacy Rate: 28.5 per cent. of the villagers could read and write in 1956.

Schools:

- One Higher Elementary School—286 pupils.
- One Harijan Elementary School—103 pupils.
- Junior High School is at Red Hills, 4 miles away.
- High School at Ponneri, 9 miles away.

Typical Annual Incomes:

	<i>Gross</i>	<i>Savings</i>
Large Landlord	£ 1,300	£ 500
Medium Landlord	£ 650	£ 400
Large Tenant Cultivator	£ 650	£ 180
Small Tenant Cultivator	£ 100	£ 1*
Craftsman	£ 50	—*
Agricultural Labourer	£ 20	—*

* People in these groups rarely save anything, but get deeper in debt year by year.

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1 South Indian Village

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PLATES

1—P. N. Srinivasan, Krishna Photo Studio, Madras 17 ; 2, 3—Indian Council of Agricultural Research ; the remaining photographs in this booklet were taken by the author.

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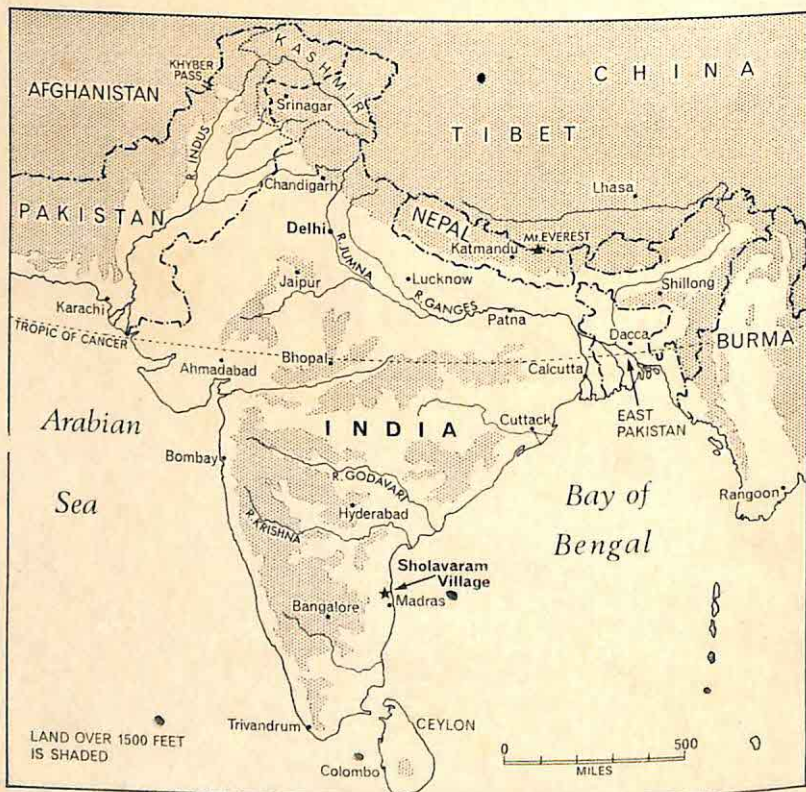
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The arrow shows the location of Sholavaram village.



PLATE 1

AT THE VILLAGE POND. Most Madras villages like Sholavaram have a pond or two where people come to wash themselves as well as their utensils, clothes and cattle. A well can be seen on the far side of the pond.

(Courtesy of P. N. Srinivasan.)

SOUTH INDIAN VILLAGE

India is building up industries at a considerable pace, but it is still a land of villages. There are about half a million altogether, with nearly 20,000 in Madras State alone. In this booklet we shall take a look at one of them.

THE WAY TO SHOLAVARAM

Sholavaram lies in the extreme north-east corner of Madras, in the District of Chingleput about 20 miles from Madras City. It





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Tapping the date palm.

(Courtesy of
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PLATE 3

Madras is pre-eminently the land of the Palmyra palm. (Courtesy of Indian Council of Agricultural Research)

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is right by the main road which links Madras with Calcutta, a thousand miles away. Fast cars speeding along the smooth-surfaced highway are a familiar sight, yet the villagers of Sholavaram follow a pattern of life still largely unaffected by the technical advances of the twentieth century.

We reach the village by driving along this highway from the great and growing city of Madras (population 1,729,000: 1961), the capital of the State and third largest city of India. As we motor north along the coastal plain we understand why Madras has been called "The Land of the Palmyra Palm". These tall, graceful palms waving in the sea breeze make an unforgettable sight, and here and there we spot the nimble "toddy gatherers" scaling up the swaying trunks to tap the young flower stalks.*

The narrow coastal plain extends inland for about 30 miles to a background of blue-purple hills which mark the peninsular interior. All around is an expanse of padi fields, broken up here and there by groves of trees such as palms and mangoes. Each of these usually denotes the presence of a hamlet. From the air, another feature of the landscape stands out, the countless saucer-like reservoirs or "tanks", large and small, in which rain water is stored.

MADRAS AND THE MONSOONS

When asked about the climate of India, most of us immediately think of the monsoons. We have an idea of long, dry, dusty months broken by a dramatic "bursting of the monsoon" when the summer rainy season begins in June or July. In fact, however, Madras is the one part of India where this picture of the climate does not hold good. This is because the State is so completely sheltered by the high mountains to the west. It lies in a "rain-shadow" area during the months from July to September when the rest of the country is experiencing heavy rains from the south-west.

As if in compensation, however, the Madras coast, alone of all India, gets a good quota of rain from the *north-east monsoon* which around November brings moist winds which have passed over the Bay of Bengal. After these rains, there is a long dry spell from

* There is a great flow of sugary sap to the developing flowers in a number of members of the Palm family, notably the Date Palm and the Palmyra Palm. Drawers of toddy take advantage of this. The toddy may be fermented to make an alcoholic drink or evaporated to make a brown sugar (jaggery).



PLATE 4

This primitive water-lifting device, the *picotah*, is still seen everywhere across the Madras countryside. It is very similar to the *shaduf*, used in both ancient and modern Egypt. The latter is usually worked by one man, who has a rope to pull down the unweighted end of the beam, thus lowering his bucket into the water. Here, a boy raises and lowers the bucket for his father by walking the "see-saw" on either side of the vertical support. Note the long bamboo pole to help him keep his balance. Down the water channel about fifty yards (not in picture) his five-year-old sister was directing the precious flow along the rows of beans.

January to June. The Madras farmers meet this difficult climatic problem by impounding as much rain as possible in the earth tanks which are to be seen everywhere in this countryside. In such a tropical climate crops will grow all year round if only water can be provided for them. In February, at the time of our visit, modern electric pumps and ancient picotahs are working overtime.

THE CASTE SYSTEM

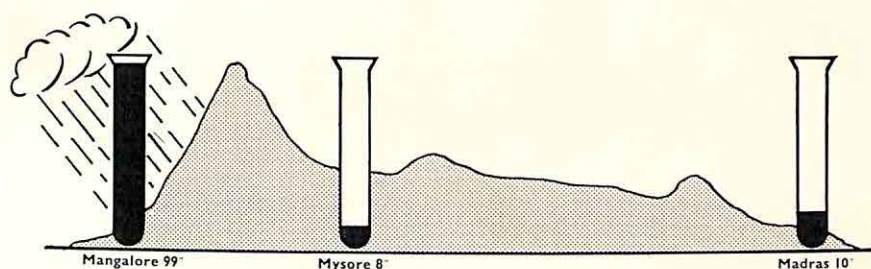
The peoples of South India are mostly descendants of the dark-skinned Dravidians. It was from a blending of their ancient beliefs and customs with those of the fairer-skinned Aryans of the north that the Hindu culture of India evolved. Immediately on arriving in Sholavaram, we come face to face with a very significant feature of Hindu life, the caste system. We find that there seems to be not just one village, but six—and that each of these constituent ham-

lets is the preserve of a particular caste-group. The idea of caste has been a feature of Hinduism for thousands of years and still flourishes strongly to-day, although the barriers between the castes are not quite as rigid as they used to be.

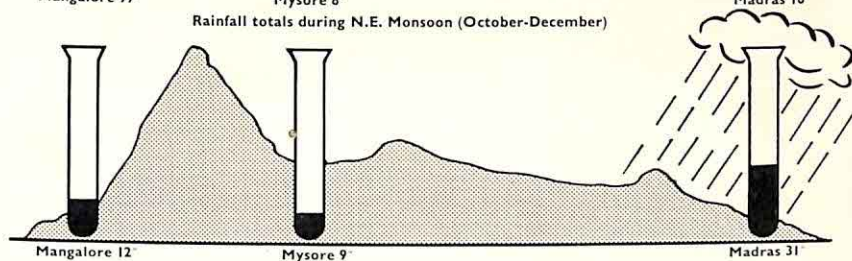
There are several thousand different castes in India. Formerly they could be divided into four major groups, the priests and

SECTIONS ACROSS THE SOUTHERN DECCAN

Rainfall totals during S.W. Monsoon (June-August)



Rainfall totals during N.E. Monsoon (October-December)

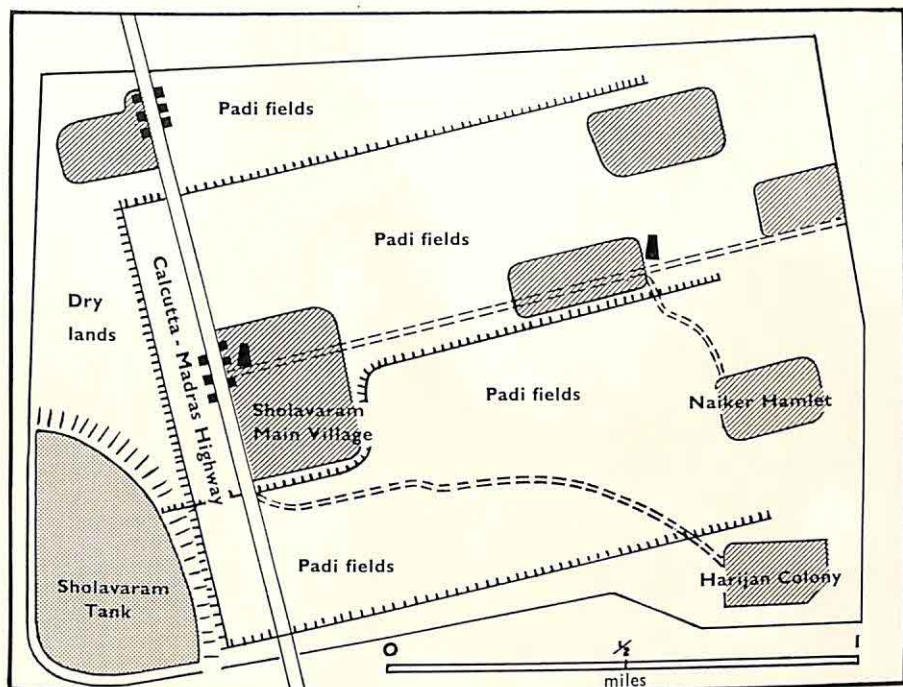


scholars, the warriors, the farmers and traders, and the labourers. To-day, the castes remain, but they are not restricted to their former occupations, and it is usual to classify them into these three groups—High, Medium and Low Hindus. Below these groups are the people without caste, the so-called “untouchables”. Members of each caste are bound to carry out carefully and thoroughly a whole range of customs and rites. These rules are held to be particularly important in all matters concerned with marriage and food, and formerly it was generally forbidden to marry or take food with members of another caste. It is still the practice to marry within the caste, but nowadays it is quite common to find people



PLATE 5

The poorest class in Sholavaram are the *Harijans*. Traditionally, they were treated as "untouchables", and although this system is gradually being broken down they still live in a separate part of the village called the *cheri*. This Harijan girl stands outside her mud-walled home. The roof is thatched with palm leaves and padi-straw on rafters of bamboo. There are no windows. In the pen in the foreground is a calf, which is the family's only possession apart from a few clothes, earthenware pots and their hut.



 Irrigation ditches
  Tracks
  Temples
  Shops and stalls

Map of Sholavaram Village, showing dispersed hamlets where different caste-groups live.

eating with members of another caste, especially in public tea-houses.

The hardest barrier of all to break down, however, has been the stigma of untouchability. Formerly, a caste Hindu felt defiled if he approached within forty feet of an untouchable. Now the Indian Constitution protects these unfortunate people. They are known as the "Scheduled Classes" and may no longer lawfully be treated as outcasts. Nevertheless tradition dies hard in rural areas and even to-day few other villagers are willing to share water from the same well as members of the Scheduled Classes.

In Sholavaram there are two hamlets or "cheris" of Harijans who are members of a Scheduled Class. They are landless agricultural labourers, but not the only ones in the village. Members of all the other main castes except the Brahmins are to be found in this occupation.



PLATE 6

This view looks across the fields to the edge of one of the hamlets of Sholavaram and shows the home of another poor villager. The typical pyramid shape is clearly seen, with the pointed thatched roof and the eaves of palmyra palm leaves reaching right down over the low mud walls and almost touching the ground. This keeps the interior of the hut as cool as possible. In the background rises a *gopuram*, the gateway of the village temple and a typical example of South Indian architecture.

HOMES AND HAMLETS

The lands of Sholavaram total 1,475 acres, and a glance at the map on page 7 shows that the seven hamlets are scattered in all parts of the area. The principal centre of the village is that adjoining the main highway, opposite Sholavaram Tank, and here there

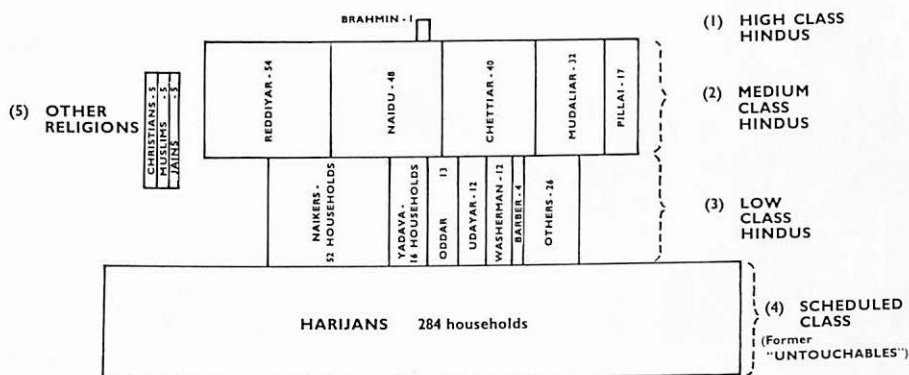


Diagram showing the number of households in each caste in Sholavaram. It should not be taken as typical of other villages—in fact there is no general pattern. Usually there would be more Brahmins than is the case here. A number of this caste have left Sholavaram and gone to live in Madras City.

are a number of shops and stalls which gain some custom from passing travellers. One of the village temples stands here; another shown on Plate 6 is in a second hamlet about a mile away to the east.

Tracks through the padi fields link up the various clusters of habitation. For the most part they are wide enough to take bullock carts, the common form of transport. Bicycles are becoming quite common in other areas but few villagers in Sholavaram can afford them.

There are 28 wells in various parts of the village lands, many of them worked by picotahs as shown in Plate 4. It is reckoned that one such well can irrigate two acres of land. But most of the irrigation water comes from Sholavaram Tank, being led out by a system of channels which enable it to supply nearly 900 acres of the village lands.



PLATE 7

The Harijans of Sholavaram are hard-working farm labourers but very few of them own any land of their own. Usually the whole community is hired by a landlord to carry out his essential farming tasks throughout the year. Here, in late February, a group of men are lifting young padi plants from a nursery bed, tying them in bundles to be carried over to their womenfolk who are transplanting them out in a nearby field. In the background is seen stubble from a rice crop which has recently been harvested, for in the warm climate of Madras it can be grown in all seasons. Usually, however, there are two main seasons, coinciding with the two monsoons.

Most of the houses are built of bamboo and mud with roofs thatched of straw and palm leaves. The Brahmin family and a few Medium Hindus in Sholavaram Main Village, however, have brick homes with tiled roofs. Most homes are simple rectangles consisting of a single room. There may be niches on each side of the doorway for burning lights for religious purposes, and the outer door post usually shows traces of vermillion and saffron placed there every Friday in honour of Lakshmi, one of the Hindu goddesses.

THE UNITY OF THE VILLAGE

Although, like most Madras villages, Sholavaram is dispersed into separate hamlets, there are certain occasions when all the villagers may come together. In the temples, which are surprisingly ornate and beautiful for such a poor village, there are regular festivals concerned with the marriages and incarnations of the gods and goddesses. At such times all the villagers may congregate at the temple and celebrate the festival together. Also in the main hamlet is an open space called the *choultry* where the villagers meet for gossip, and the *chavadi* which serves as a court for hearing all disputes about caste questions. There are also common pasture grounds, threshing floors and the village as a whole rates itself to pay the workers who maintain the Tank and its irrigation channels. These matters are the concern of the *Panchayat* or Village Council.

FARMING

Farming in South India is vastly different from anywhere in the western world to-day, although it could very well be likened to that in Europe in the Middle Ages. In spite of the efforts of the Indian Government to promote Land Reform,* the system of landlords, tenants and landless labourers remains, although the labourers are no longer serfs as they were a few years ago.

Some tenants actually work on the land they rent, but mostly they simply hire labourers to do so. More than half the rural

* Efforts have been in two main directions—the fixing of a “ceiling” on the size of farms, and minimum wages for farm labourers, about 2s. per day.



PLATE 8

After the soil is well soaked, the padi field is ploughed three or four times. The simple wooden plough does not turn the earth but simply stirs it up. Here five Harijan ploughmen drive their pairs of bullocks round and round through the mud.



PLATE 9

The ploughing team works the entire surface of the field to a soft puddle, and is followed by this pair of bullocks yoked in a similar way and drawing a *levelling-plank*. Notice the power lines and electric light at the door of the pumphouse. Under the Five Year Plans electricity is reaching more and more villages. Few in Sholavaram can afford it in their homes, but landowners with electric pumps can bring more water more quickly to their fields than those still using the picotah.

population of Madras is made up of farm labouring families. In Sholavaram they number over a thousand, mostly Harijans, and on their shoulders falls most of the day to day toil on the village lands. They are paid wages by the day, but usually can find employment only for about half the year.

Under the old system, which really amounted to serfdom, the landlord often paid no wages but supplied his workers with food. In addition he would give clothing and an extra gift of rice on certain important festivals. At the birth of a child another gift of rice would be made, usually 16 lb. for a boy and 8 lb. for a girl. The difference was because the boy would work for the landowner when he grew up whereas the girl would go away after her marriage. This old system still continues to some extent and, where it does, the landlords pay lower wages than the minimum.

THE FARMING YEAR

"The world centres around the tip of the plough." — Tamil proverb.

In the warm climate of Madras, crops will grow all year round. It is water which is the limiting factor, and so farming depends on the monsoon rains and on the amount of water that can be saved from them and made available during the rest of the year. In Sholavaram the main padi crop is grown to coincide with the North-East Monsoon when ample water is available both directly as rain and from Sholavaram Tank.

Crops and Seasons at Sholavaram Village.

In early August the nursery beds are prepared with great care. They are ploughed again and again until a fine tilth is obtained, and any manure that can be spared is applied. Then the sprouted padi seeds are sown. About five weeks later they are ready for transplanting. Next the fields themselves are flooded, and ploughed with almost the same care as was given to the nurseries. There may have been a green manure crop grown on the field previously, if so the plants are now pulled and trampled into the mud. Where possible green leaves are also obtained and spread over the fields which are kept flooded to help the leaves rot. Artificial fertilisers such as urea, phosphates and ammonium sulphate are widely used

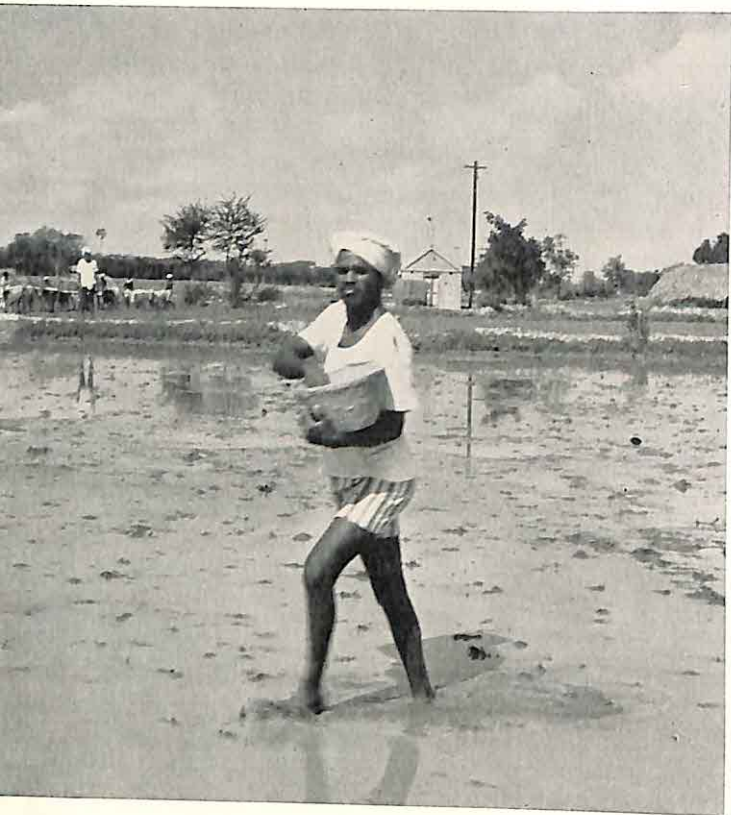


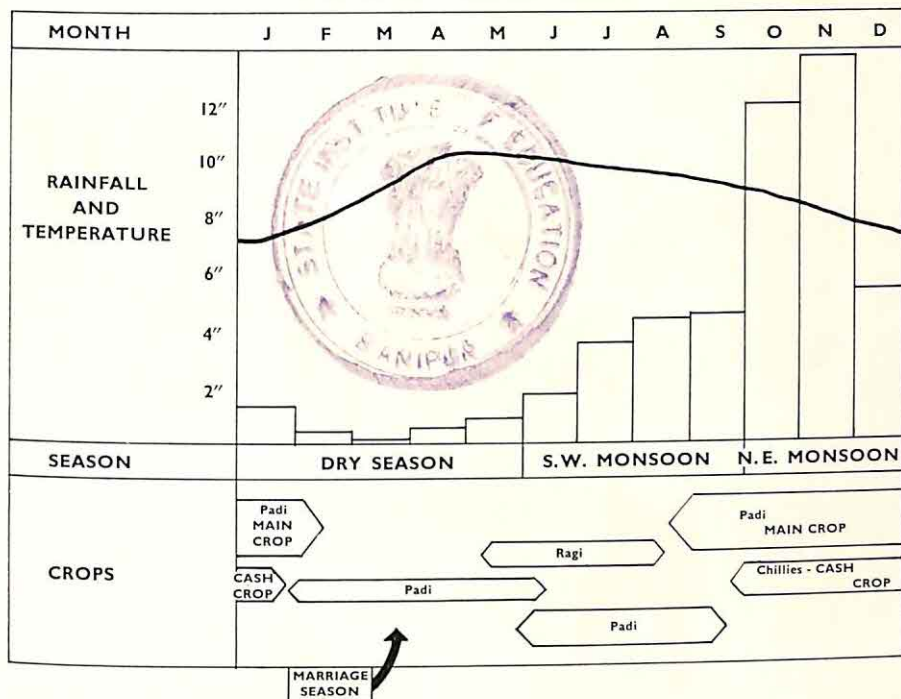
PLATE 10

In general, Indian crop yields are very low and this is largely due to lack of manure. Around Sholavaram, however, the landlords realise the value of fertilisers and spend up to £5 per acre each year on them. This is a high figure by any standards. Here a Harijan worker is broadcasting urea, a valuable nitrogenous manure. Ammonium sulphate and ground nut cake are also used extensively.

by the more prosperous landlords. They spend up to £5 per acre on them, a high figure by any standards.

Ploughing is repeated three or four times until the entire surface is stirred into a soft puddle and the field is then levelled with a levelling-board. After transplanting is completed the bunds which enclose the water in the fields are checked to repair any leakage of water through crab or rat holes. Then the water is drained out for a short time so that the seedlings will take root more quickly. When it is let in again, care is taken not to submerge the crop, and from then on the level is carefully controlled to keep pace with the growing padi. Nearly 60 inches of water is needed from planting to final irrigation, and the Sholavaram farmer expects to get about

FARMING CALENDAR



half this amount from the north-east monsoon rains falling directly on his fields and to make up the rest from the tank supply.

During the growing season the labourers will be out again in the flooded fields from time to time, weeding the crop by hand. It is then that the greater part of the village lands becomes a sea of waving green padi, although here and there are patches of dry crops such as chillies which are sold for the market.

In January the north-east monsoon is over, very little rain falls and the padi ripens quickly in the hot sun. About a week before harvest the water is drained from the fields. At reaping time the labourers cut the crop with their hand sickles and tie it into bundles. Sometimes this is done when the padi is dead ripe, so that the other operations of threshing and winnowing are carried out on the same day. Otherwise the crop is stacked and left for a while. Threshing is usually done in two stages, by beating the sheaves on the ground and then by treading them with cattle. The



PLATE 11

As the long line of planters moves slowly across the padi field it is kept supplied with bundles of seedlings brought fresh from the nursery bed nearby. Harijan women are renowned as experts at this back-breaking work.



grain is cleaned by pouring it in the wind to separate the seeds from the chaff. Then it is usually stored in large, sun-dried, mud bins.

In February also the chillies are picked, dried and bagged. By now it is well into the dry season. For most of the villagers, when the harvest is gathered, a pause must come in the yearly round. This is the most popular time for marriages in Sholavaram.

Fortunate landowners who have wells or pumps can take a crop during the dry season, but only about a quarter of Sholavaram's lands are thus used. Such a padi crop is sown in late January and harvested in June. It is more usual for a second crop to be grown during the south-west monsoon season, from June to September. In a few cases, though, three crops a year are grown.

The Ragi Crop

For those who cannot obtain tank water from June to September, a dry crop of *ragi* is commonly sown. Ragi is one of the many types of millet that are so widely grown throughout India, especially where less water is available or where the soils are poorer. Sometimes it is irrigated and it will then yield nearly four times as much as the dry crop.

The harvesting of ragi requires much care and close attention for the individual earheads do not ripen at the same time and the harvest must extend over a number of days. The earheads are gathered as they ripen and are allowed to ferment slightly in heaps when the grains become loose in the husk and are easily trodden out by cattle.

A DAY IN FEBRUARY

A feature of South India which is surprising to people from cooler climates is that at any one time it is possible to see all manner of farm operations going on simultaneously. Most of the photographs in this booklet were taken one day in late February. Let us imagine we are looking around Sholavaram on such a day. We start from the main village on the busy highway and walk down past the great tank now barely half full. Turning off the road we take the dusty bullock track leading to one of the Harijan colonies. Around us most of the fields look dry, cracked and bare. They still carry the stubble of the main padi crop which has been



PLATE 12

It is typical of the Madras countryside that all manner of farm operations may be under way at the same time. On the same February day as the transplanting was being done, another Harijan group in the next field were engaged in threshing the previous rice crop which had been harvested a few weeks earlier. The method is simply to beat the sheaves on the ground. Later they may be trodden by cattle.



PLATE 13

Here is seen the next stage, that of cleaning the grain by winnowing. It is poured in the wind so that the chaff blows clear of the grain. Note the large number of workers engaged in threshing and winnowing, two tasks which could well be carried out by a single machine. People can be used only because of the very low wages they are paid, about £1 per month.

harvested the month before, and here and there cattle and goats are grazing, although the pasture they find is poor indeed.

Then we come upon a group of Harijan men lifting the seedlings from a flooded padi nursery, whose rich emerald green provides a striking contrast to the yellowed stubble fields around. Although it is February, it cannot be called winter as the temperature is around 80° F. and most of the men are almost naked, dressed only in a loin cloth and a loose turban to protect their heads from the blazing sun. As they lift the plants they deftly tie them in bundles for one of their number to place on a tray and carry away on his head.

We follow him a matter of a hundred yards or so and come upon further groups of Harijans, both men and women, in adjoining fields, which have been flooded. The men are ploughing. They have already finished the preparation of one of the fields in which the women are gathering ready to commence transplanting the padi.

We pause first to watch the ploughmen. There are five of them, each with a pair of bullocks yoked to the simplest of ploughs. Round and round the field they go, until the mud has been puddled almost to the smoothness of a potter's clay. The treading by men and cattle plays nearly as much part in this as the plough itself, which does not turn the earth but simply stirs it up. When they are judged to have churned the mud sufficiently, a levelling-plank is drawn over it by another bullock-team. Now the field is ready for the planters.

We turn to watch this operation which is already under way in the next flooded field. A team of twenty or so Harijan womenfolk, renowned for their skill at this work, move slowly in line across the field, planting as they go. This is one of the most important tasks of all in padi-farming and, like so many other burdensome jobs in Asia, it is usually reserved for the women. They chatter quietly to each other as they work back across the field, turning around now and then to pick up their next bundle of seedlings which have been set out behind them. It is a moving sight to watch the area of fresh young seedlings spreading out over the field and to think of what the padi crop means to countless millions of people throughout Asia.

HARVESTING

A stone's throw away, another twenty or so Harijan men and women are threshing and winnowing the main padi crop which has been reaped and stacked a few weeks earlier. We watch the women climbing up the stacks and bringing the padi sheaves to the men. The latter beat the bundles on the ground and then scoop up the fallen grain and winnow it in the wind. The straw is stacked again alongside and will later receive a second threshing, this time being trampled by cattle.

THE WEDDING

The sound of amplified music floating across the countryside calls us away from these age-old scenes. It comes from Thottakaramedu, the hamlet of the Naiker caste, which lies about half a mile to the north-east. Our friends tell us that a wedding is in progress so we make our way along the bunds and over the fields into the grove of mango trees and palmyra palms which surround the hamlet of this Low Hindu caste.

Just about the whole caste group is at the wedding—it is in fact the wedding season. Most of the country people have little to do in February except those labourers such as the Harijans employed by a landowner who can obtain water supplies in the dry season.

To-day Natarajan is to marry Sundarammal. The wedding was arranged a long time ago by their parents, but that is not the reason they do not smile. It is simply not the custom to do so on this the most serious and exciting day in their lives.

A dais of bamboos festooned with leaves and flowers has been erected in front of the bride's home, and instead of the usual musicians with pipe, drum and cymbals, recordings of the traditional songs are played over a loudspeaker system hired for the occasion. Although not invited guests, we are eagerly welcomed and asked to take a wedding photograph. The villagers crowd around as we also snap the expert dancer who has been performing for the guests. She is not dressed in the gorgeous sari gleaming with diamonds which we might see at a rich man's wedding, but she has been trained in the classical dances and every smile, movement and "mudra" (hand gesture) has a meaning, harking back to the old Hindu scriptures and religious stories.

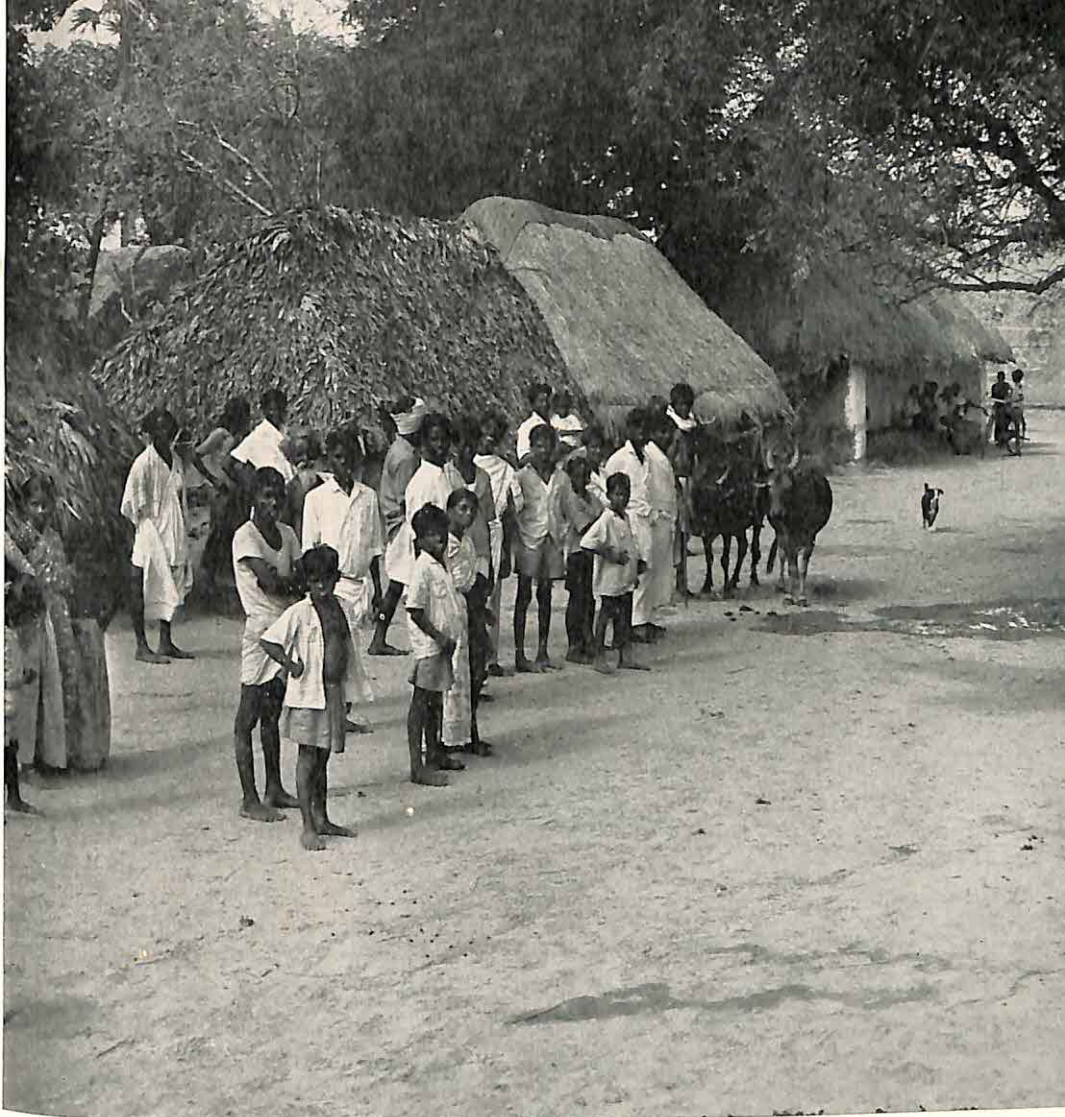


PLATE 14

This is the main street of Thottakaramedu, the hamlet of the Naiker Caste in Sholavaram. They are an advanced caste who are mainly small landowners and tenant farmers. The villagers in the picture are gathering for the main ceremonies of a wedding.

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STATISTICAL SUMMARY

Sholavaram Village: Ponneri Tehsil, Chingleput District, Madras State, India.

Location: 9 miles north of Ponneri Town on main highway Madras-Calcutta.

Population: 2,689 (1956). **Density:** 1,160/square mile.

Area of Village Lands: 1,475 acres, of which 1,130 are cultivated, mostly double-cropped.

Religion: 99 per cent. Hindu. **Languages:** Tamil and Telugu.

Usual Foods: Rice, ragi. (Poorer people have less rice and more ragi.)

Chief Crops Grown: Padi, ragi, chillies.

Average Size of Farm Holding: 2.4 acres. (There are 230 separate holdings, more than three-quarters of them are smaller than 3 acres.)

Numbers of Livestock:

Bullocks	295
Cows	276
Male Buffaloes	42
Female Buffaloes	109
Young stock	423
Poultry	526
	1,669

Housing: 81 per cent. of homes are mud and thatch; 19 per cent. of homes are brick and mortar. Three-quarters of all homes are less than 200 sq. ft. in area.

Other Buildings:

27 shops
4 temples
2 schools
1 dispensary
1 co-operative mill office
1 dye-factory
1 flour mill

Literacy Rate: 28.5 per cent. of the villagers could read and write in 1956.

Schools:

One Higher Elementary School—286 pupils.
One Harijan Elementary School—103 pupils.
Junior High School is at Red Hills, 4 miles away.
High School at Ponneri, 9 miles away.

Typical Annual Incomes:

	Gross	Savings
Large Landlord	£ 1,300	£ 500
Medium Landlord	£ 650	£ 400
Large Tenant Cultivator	£ 650	£ 180
Small Tenant Cultivator	£ 100	£ 1*
Craftsman	£ 50	—*
Agricultural Labourer	£ 20	—*

* People in these groups rarely save anything, but get deeper in debt year by year.

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1 South Indian Village

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PLATES .

1—P. N. Srinivasan, Krishna Photo Studio, Madras 17 ; 2, 3—Indian Council of Agricultural Research ; the remaining photographs in this booklet were taken by the author.

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The World's Villages

1

South Indian Village

T. O. Newnham

2

Lake Village in Cambodia

T. O. Newnham

3

Choba—A Japanese Village

John Macnab

4

Afghanistan Village

T. F. Kennedy



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